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# Mary Stuart on the English and American stage

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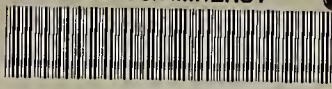
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MARY STUART ON THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STAGE

Marian Gleason

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There are certain figures in history who never die, but whose very names speak glamour and vividness and charm to every generation. Cleopatra is one of these magic personalities; even more real, perhaps, is Mary, Queen of Scots. No other occupant really lives for the visitor to Holyrood; Mary's personality pervades each narrow hall and every barren little room. Everyone knows a little of Mary's story, and everyone longs to know more. That is why each tourist listens so eagerly to the legends related by the Edinburgh guide. That is why each succeeding biography of Mary Stuart is read and discussed with interest, although the evidence remains the same, and much of the story will probably forever be a mystery. Because Mary seems so baffling, biographer after biographer has begun a study that almost invariably has found him at the end a wholehearted champion of his subject. Even the playwrights have cheerfully clothed in velvet and jewels an enigma, an idealization, a saint, or a sinner, as the interpretation might be, so that Mary Stuart might win other men's hearts as she had won theirs.

Quite aside from the heroine's charm, there are a number of reasons for the interest of dramatists in Mary, Queen of Scots. Undeniably, there are dramatic elements in her story. The girl of eighteen who was asked to match wits with Queen Elizabeth, John Knox, and most of her own noblemen into the bargain is certainly a fitting subject for drama. Rizzio's murder is thrilling enough for any climax. The spiritual and temperamental

contrast of the two queens offers great possibilities to a dramatist. The dramatic manner of Mary's death has appealed to dramatists who sensed here a tragedy that could "purify the soul through pity and fear," as well as to those who wished to glorify a Catholic martyr.

A number of religious plays have been written about Mary, particularly in Catholic countries, soon after her death. Only a few have been written on a nationalistic theme. The great majority have been the story of a charming woman who sinned or was greatly sinned against, or a woman who has become invested with "the sanctity of misfortune and the consecration of suffering."<sup>1.</sup>

#### WORK PREVIOUSLY DONE IN THIS FIELD

In 1907, a German scholar, Dr. Karl Kipka, summarized Mary Stuart's dramatic career up to that time. He has compiled a bibliography of about one hundred and forty items. He begins with plays of the Catholic school and folk drama, including the drama of the Jesuits at Prague, 1644, and at Neuburg, 1702, and the Tyrol folk dramas, 1749-1802. "Mary Stuart in the drama of the Renaissance" includes the plays of Joost van Vondel, 1646, Christophorus Kormart, 1673, and Johannes Riemer, 1679. Under "Mary Stuart in Spanish and Italian drama of the Seventeenth Century," Kipka includes Maria Stuart of Manuel de Gallegos, La Reyna Maria Estuarda (c. 1660) of Juan Bautista Diamante, and La Maria Stuarda<sup>1.</sup> Kipka, Maria Stuart in Drama, p.5



Regina di Scotia e d'Inghilterra, written by Horatio Celli in 1665. French drama has contributed to Mary Stuart literature Regnault, Marie Stuard, Reyne l'Ecosse, 1639, and Boursault, Marie Stuart, 1683. Kipka includes under "Germanic Drama of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" the English as well as the German plays of this period. He lists here Banks's Albion Queens, 1684, John St. John's Mary, Queen of Scots, 1739, Francklin's Mary, Queen of Scots, 1770, Speiss's Marie Stuart, 1784, a Hamburg puppet play in 1770. After a chapter on Schiller and one on Vittorio Alfieri, Kipka concludes his book with a chapter entitled "Retrospect and Prospect" in which he considers such dramatists as Swinburne, Michael Field, and Robert Blake.

#### WORK DONE IN PREPARATION FOR THIS PAPER

As indicated in my bibliography, my reading has been of three types. I have read historical background material, principally biographies of Mary, Queen of Scots. I have read plays about Mary, Queen of Scots, concerning myself chiefly with those written in English. I have read critical comment on English and American plays.

#### JUSTIFICATION FOR MAKING THIS STUDY

In making this study, I have attempted to supplement Kipka's bibliography and to bring it up to date, as far as the drama in England and America is concerned. I have also attempted to study analytically Mary Stuart's history in terms

of the drama in English.

#### STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

This study has seemed to show that although Mary Stuart has pervaded dramatic consciousness in England and America over a period of two hundred and fifty years, her story has not justified the faith of playwrights in it.

#### METHOD PROPOSED

In presenting this hypothesis, I shall divide the plays in English into three groups: those not acted, those not acted with notable success, and those successfully acted. In considering theactable plays, I shall show that the dramatic appeal of Mary's personality, so irresistible to so many dramatists, is apparently overbalanced by a number of dramatic difficulties in her career.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

I have included in my study of Mary Stuart on the English and American stage one foreign play, Schiller's Maria Stuart, because it has been played repeatedly and successfully in translation in both England and America. Until Maxwell Anderson's play, Schiller's drama was almost certainly the most widely known Mary Stuart play in America.<sup>1.</sup>

#### PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to give very sincere thanks to Professor Rand of

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1. Schiller's is the only Mary Stuart play mentioned in Coad and Mims, American Stage (1929); see also below, p. 13.



Massachusetts State College for assistance in discovering and correlating material, to Professor Allardyce Nicoll of Yale University for information that he has given me, to Mr. Basil Wood, librarian of Massachusetts State College, for his cooperation in obtaining a number of books.

#### SUPPLEMENT TO WORK OF KIPKA

I have found evidence of seven plays, published or presented in English previous to 1907, not included in Kipka's bibliography.

John Presland (Mrs. Gladys Skelton) published in London in 1810 a play entitled Mary, Queen of Scots.<sup>1.</sup> The Abbot, or Mary of Scotland,

an adaptation by Henry Roxby Beverly of Scott's novel, The Abbot was presented at Tottenham Court Theatre in September, 1820.<sup>2.</sup> Another adaptation of the same novel, the anonymous

Mary of Scotland or Heir of Avenel was presented at the Anthony Street Theatre, New York, May 17, 1821.<sup>3.</sup> Bothwell, by J.Redding Ware, was published in London in 1871. A

play by W.G.Wills, Mary, Queen of Scots, was given at the Lyceum, London, January 8, 1870, and revived four years later at the Princess's Theatre.<sup>4.</sup> An adaptation by Lewis

Wingfield of Schiller's Maria Stuart was first played at the Court Theatre, October 9, 1880.<sup>5.</sup> Mary Stuart, the Child

of Misfortune, described as "a skit on ancient melodrama,"<sup>6.</sup> was presented at the Strand, October 17, 1893.

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1. Halkett and Laing, Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature
  2. White, Henry A., Sir Walter Scott's Novels on the Stage, p.156
  3. Ibid, p.157
  4. John Parker, Who's Who in the Theatre, p.1275
  5. Ibid
  6. In The Stage Cyclo-pedia of Plays

## ENGLISH BIBLIOGRAPHY BROUGHT UP TO DATE

I have found seven plays written in English since 1907. John Drinkwater's Mary Stuart was presented in New York in 1921. Ada Sterling, also in 1921, published an adaptation of Schiller's play. In 1922 appeared a Mary of Scots by John Carlos Kennedy Peterson. In 1929, a one-act play about Mary Stuart, entitled A Greater Power, was published in Halifax. There were two Mary Stuart plays in 1933: one the well known Mary of Scotland by Maxwell Anderson, the other End and Beginning, by John Masefield. In the following year, Queen of Scots by Gordon Daviot was produced in London.

## PLAYS IN ENGLISH NOT ACTED

Still, Mary Stuart's story has not seemed to fulfill its promise to the playwrights. There is no evidence, for example, that the following twenty-five plays were ever acted:

1. An unfinished play by Philip, Duke of Wharton
2. Thomas Francklin, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1770
3. Mary Deverell, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1792
4. James Grahame, Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots, 1801
5. Miss Elizabeth Wright Macauley, Mary Stuart, a dramatic representation, 1823
6. Mary Russell Mitford, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1831
7. A.C. Swinburne, Chastelard, 1865
8. J. Redding Ware, Bothwell, 1871
9. W.D. Scott Moncrieff, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1872
10. A.C. Swinburne, Bothwell, 1874
11. Violet Fane, Anthony Babington, 1876
12. A.C. Swinburne, Mary Stuart, 1881
13. David Riccio, by the author of Ginevra, 1882
14. Charles Gulland, Elizabeth of England, 1883
15. Major General John Watts De Peyster, Bothwell, 1885
16. M. Quinn, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1884
17. Michael Field, The Tragic Mary, 1890
18. Robert Blake, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1894

19. David Graham, Riccio, 1898
20. Charles Gulland, Queen Mary and Darnley, 1902
21. N.S.Shaler, The Rival Queens, 1903
22. Ada Sterling, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1921
23. J.C.K. Peterson, Mary of Scots, 1922
24. T.Green, A Greater Power, 1929
25. John Masefield, End and Beginning, 1933

#### PLAYS IN ENGLISH ACTED WITHOUT NOTABLE SUCCESS

Several, moreover, of the plays that were acted apparently met with scant success. Mary, Queen of Scots, by John St. John, for example, appeared at the Drury Lane Theatre in March, 1789. Two members of the cast, at least, were distinguished: Mrs. Siddons played the part of Mary and John Philip Kemble was the original Norfolk. James Boaden tells us that the tragedy "however feeble, from the charms of the heroine and her representative (was) acted several times."<sup>1.</sup> A contemporary theatrical journal remarks that "it had a most powerful support from the audience of the first night, but with every assistance of scenes, dresses and excellent acting, will probably never be popular."<sup>2.</sup> Apparently the prophecy was justified. Genest records nine performances, and informs us that "it is a moderate play - (St. John) has taken considerable pains with the character of Queen Mary and with success - some speeches in the part of Norfolk are good - the rest of the play is dull."<sup>3.</sup> After that, we hear no more about it.

Murray's Mary, Queen of Scots or The Escape from Lochleven

1. James Boaden, Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons, p.326
2. European Magazine, 1789, XV, 243 (Kipka, p.289)
3. Genest, English Stage, 1660-1830, VI, 535



suggested by Scott's novel, The Abbot, fared a little better. It was first produced as an afterpiece in Edinburgh in 1825 and was revived at the London Olympic in 1831 with Miss Foote playing the part of Mary. This was a very gorgeous performance. Madame Vestris, the manager, set the stage with solid carved oak furniture, carpets, and realistic stained glass windows, all stamped with the royal Stuart arms. This time, Mary Queen of Scots shared the program with a play called Olympic Revels. In the course of the run, Murray's play was for

1. some reason taken off the bill. Murray's play may have been the Mary Stuart or the Castle of Lochleven that was presented at Drury Lane in 1850. 2. After this, at all events, it disappears from London. It was, however, for some time a favorite among Scottish stock companies, apparently because of the opportunities offered by the comic role of Sandy Macfarlane. 3.

4. Two other dramatizations of The Abbot met with less success. One, ascribed to Henry Roxby Beverly, entitled The Abbot or Mary of Scotland and described as a "serious, melodramatic, historical burletta" 5. appeared at the Tottenham Court Theatre in September, 1820. Of its success, we know

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1. Sherson, London's Lost Theatres of the XIX Century, p.86
  2. See The Stage Cyclopedia
  3. Dibden, Annals of Edinburgh Stage, p.312
  4. It is apparently not known which version was played in Bath, Jan, 3, 1827: "The piece was Scott's novel of The Abbot badly dramatized but with one pretty good scene - that in which Mary Stuart signs her consent to resign the throne." Genest, IX, 401.
  5. White, p.156

only that "commendation is lacking in the usual sources of dramatic criticism."<sup>1.</sup> An anonymous version of The Abbot was given on May 18 (?), 1821, in the Anthony Street Theatre, New York.<sup>2.</sup> "This effort," we hear, "fell flat."

Mary Stuart by James Haynes opened on January 22, 1840, at Drury Lane, with Macready in the leading role of Ruthven. (Mary is somewhat subordinated in this play; the conflict is that of political idealism as represented by Ruthven, opposed to entrenched political power as represented by Rizzio.) The play had a run of twenty performances, but "cannot have been profitable, since at the end of February Hammond (the producer) failed for £8000."<sup>3.</sup>

In the same year, this play was presented at the Park Theatre, New York. "It was repeated a few times," we read,<sup>4.</sup> "but did not survive the season." It is interesting to compare the success of this play with that of Bulwer-Lytton's Richlieu, the title role of which was also performed by Macready. He appeared in this at least sixty-eight times in London. From the first performance, the public was so enthusiastic that for three months no new dramatic effort was required of Macready's company.<sup>5.</sup> In New York, Richlieu was triumphantly successful not only with Macready, but with Booth, Edwin Forrest and Robert Mantell as Richlieu.<sup>6.</sup>

1. White, p. 156

2. George O'Dell, Annals of the New York Stage, II, 595

3. William Archer, Eminent Actors, p.125

4. Ireland, Records of New York Stage, II, 309

5. Archer, p.121

6. See Coad and Mims, pp.89,94,218, 270



No more spectacular than the success of Haynes's play was that of Mary, Queen of Scots by W.G.Wills which opened at the Lyceum January 8, 1870, and was revived February 23, 1874, at the Princess's. We are told that Wills's verse was "mostly of the pedestrian sort . . . level and monotonous,"<sup>1.</sup> which may in part explain why this play was not more enthusiastically received. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, who played the part of Chastelard, has recorded that this was "purely a theatrical play and hardly convincing."<sup>2.</sup> At all events, it was soon withdrawn.<sup>3.</sup>

Drinkwater's Mary Stuart, which appeared in New York in 1921, met with little approval from either audience or critics. The latter criticized especially Drinkwater's writing in one act and a prologue, since he made it seem that the modern people who discuss their troubles in the prologue were his real interest, rather than Mary Stuart. One reviewer complains that the prologue raises expectations not fulfilled in the play itself,<sup>4.</sup> another describes it merely as injudicious;<sup>5.</sup> Alexander Woolcott declares that he suspects the prologue of having been written by someone else!<sup>6.</sup> Ludwig Lewisohn says that the play itself "lacks vitality and a necessary sense of progression towards some culmination."<sup>7.</sup> Although the playwright was important, and the acting, we are told, of

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1. Academy (London), 1898, 53:598
  2. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, A Player Under Three Reigns, p.54
  3. Ibid, p.60
  4. N.Y.Times, April 3, 1921, II, 2:4
  5. O.W.Firkins, Weekly Review, 4:322
  6. N.Y.Times, April 3, 1921, VII, 1:1
  7. Nation (New York), 112:565

distinguished merit,<sup>1.</sup> the play was withdrawn after a run of forty performances. It must have been a disappointment to Mr. Drinkwater, who had seen the popularity of Abraham Lincoln extend through 193 performances.

Gordon Daviot's Queen of Scots, which was played in London in 1934, does not lay itself open to quite such pointed criticisms. The reviewers suggest merely that a quiet play about Mary is rather a contradiction in terms and that the uncouthness of her times is not sufficiently emphasized.<sup>2.</sup> Again, the acting is highly praised.<sup>3.</sup> Mr. Allardyce Nicoll, however, considers the play relatively unimportant.

#### SUCCESSFUL PLAYS

Against this collection of failures and half successes, three Mary Stuart plays stand out in startling contrast. Banks's Albion Queens had, for the eighteenth century, a very respectable number of performances. It was quite a favorite in its first season, 1703-1704, being accorded eight performances,<sup>4.</sup> more than any other tragic play in that season. It was played once in the following year, once in 1728-1729, three times in 1738-1739.<sup>5.</sup> It was also played at Drury Lane, March 2, 1723; at Covent Garden, September 30, 1734, April 5, 1750, May 13, 1766,<sup>6.</sup> April 16, 1773, May 20, 1779; and at Bath, November 23, 1815.

1. Weekly Review, 4:324

2. NY. Times, July 14, X, 1:3; Contemp., Sept. 1934, p. 301

3. N.Y. Times, July 14, X, 1:3

4. Allardyce Nicoll gives figures for that season, Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 56

5. Ibid, pp. 56-58

6. Genest, index, vol. X.



We hear of it in New York on the twenty-fifth of February, 1754, of which performance we read that the works of Banks "drew more tears even from judicious audiences than the works of better writers."

1. Another evidence that it was well known to theatre goers of its time is that it was one of the plays ridiculed in Tom Thumb the Great.

2. Its popularity compares favorably with such plays as Banks's Unhappy Favorite and Otway's The Orphan.

3. Schiller's Maria Stuart has had an international reputation.

4. On June 14, 1801, it was played first at Weimar, where the audience declared it "the most beautiful tragedy ever presented on the German boards."

5. Madame de Stael characterized it as "the most moving and methodical of all German tragedies."

6. Its career in London began December 14, 1819, when it appeared at the Covent Garden Theatre and was played three times. The part of Mortimer was acted by Charles Kemble, the Earl of

7. Leicester by Macready, Mary Stuart by Miss Macauley. The

8. scaffold, we read, was exhibited "with good effect." It

apparently took some years, however, for Englishmen really to relish Schiller's easy invention of English history and his dark picture of Queen Elizabeth. In 1873, at the Opera Comique, East Strand, Adelaide Ristori appeared in some of her famous roles "including Queen Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, and the sleep-

1. George O. Seilhamer, History of the American Theatre, 1749-1774, p.59

2. Nicoll, XVIII Cent. (1700-1750), p.264

3. In those seasons for which Nicoll gives statistics, Albion Queens had 13 performances, Unhappy Favorite, 11, The Orphan 15. XVIII Cent. (1700-1750), pp56-58

4. Kipka notes performances in Vienna, Prague, Moscow.

5. Thomas, Life and Works of Friedrich Schiller, p.354

6. Ibid

7. Genest, IX, 49

8. Ibid

walking scene from Macbeth." <sup>1.</sup> As we are told in almost the next sentence that nothing lasted very long at this theatre, we assume that her success was not spectacular. Seven years later, however, Madame Modjeska, playing in London a combination of two Schiller translations: Mellish and Fanny Kemble, reached <sup>2.</sup> nearly a hundred performances. It was not such a record as that attained by Joseph Jefferson a few years before when he took Rip Van Winkle to London - that was played 170 times - but it was still a run of which to be proud. We first hear of Schiller's Mary Stuart on the American stage when, on December 13, 1829, Mrs. Duff played Mary Stuart in Boston. <sup>3.</sup> Rachel, Mrs. Lander, Adelaide Ristori, Madame Janauchek and Madame Modjeska all played in Boston repertoires including Mary Stuart. <sup>4.</sup> Of the period 1893-1896 in New York, William Winter writes that one outstanding play of the season was Rip Van Winkle with Joseph Jefferson, that "Modjeska was the cynosure of all eyes <sup>5.</sup> in Mary Stuart."

Maxwell Anderson's Mary of Scotland with Helen Hayes also received an ovation from its first night audience. Wrote Gilbert Gabriel: "The audience suspected, as I had, that we'd seen a most beautiful play." <sup>6.</sup> The Times described it as "a play of incomparable vigor and beauty - - - a drama of <sup>7.</sup> extraordinary stature." And its popularity was no

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1. Sherson, p.255
2. Helene M. Modjeska, Memories and Impressions, pp.414-415
3. J.N.Ireland, Mrs. Duff, p.101
4. See Tompkins and Kilby, History of the Boston Theatre, 1854-1901
5. William Winter, Life and Art of Richard Mansfield, I, 228
6. Moses and Brown, The American Theatre as Seen By Its Critics, 1752-1934, p.318
7. N.Y.Times, Dec.3, 1933, IX, 5:1



momentary thing. It far surpassed the record of Elizabeth the Queen which had run well past its subscription period with 147 performances. Mary of Scotland was played in New York 248 times before it was taken on the road.

#### APPEAL OF MARY'S PERSONALITY

One does not have long to wonder why so many dramatists were intrigued to write about Mary Stuart. Personally, she is quite as charming as Camille; quite as worthy as Cleopatra of the interest of a Shakespeare. She is a most attractive mixture of frailty and strength. Her charm is undeniable. She may and may not have been strikingly beautiful; her personality was irresistible.<sup>1.</sup> She was intelligent and well educated, but by no means an intellectual at heart. Although she learned languages, she never became so formidably expert in them as did Elizabeth. She was keenly conscious of her position as sovereign, keenly interested in affairs of state, yet this surprisingly varied woman would sit for hours patiently sewing in her council while her advisers talked. At times, she would put affairs aside completely, perhaps to retire for a round of golf at St. Andrews, where she would mention not a word of politics.<sup>2.</sup> She was extremely vivacious and fun-loving; in music, dancing, and horsemanship, she excelled.

1. Neale, Queen Elizabeth, p. 110

2. Parry, The Persecution of Mary Stuart, p. 122



It would seem that even John Knox saw Mary's charm, though he called it "devilish fascination."<sup>1.</sup> "In communication with

her," he remarks, "I espied such craft as I have not found in such age."<sup>2.</sup>

The description by one Nicholas White of Mary in captivity shows what must have been the charm that could transcend age and failure: "Beside that she was a goodly personage, and yet in truth not comparable to our sovereign, she had withal an alluring grace, a pretty Scottish accent, and a searching wit, crowded with mildness . . . Then joy is a lively infective sense and carrieth many persuasions to the heart which ruleth all the rest. Mine own affection

by seeing the Queen's majesty is doubled, and thereby I guess what sight might work in others."<sup>3.</sup> In prison, "she

was worshipped by her household and invariably exhibited toward this small group of retainers an amiability and sweetness of temper as charming as it was unique among crowned heads."<sup>4.</sup>

Her amazing courage alone would make her a dynamic heroine. Against any adversary, no matter how powerful, she never lost heart. Without hesitation, she took up arms against the rebel Moray; alone she faced the lords at Carberry Hill, while Bothwell retreated; all she lacked was a champion to defy even Elizabeth. If, as Stefan Zweig says, her

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1. Gorman, Scottish Queen, p.138

2. Pollard, History of England from the Accession of Edward VI to the Death of Elizabeth, p.16

3. Gorman, p.424

4. Ibid, pp.449-450

1.  
courage came only in flashes, that makes her only the more human. The fact that she apparently never accepted defeat except as a challenge to victory gives the dramatist at once a lady in very great distress and a heroine who could be a positive dramatic force.

Beyond this, however, Mary has as many personalities as there are people who have tried to interpret her. We have Swinburne's sensuous Mary opposed to Graham's pure Scottish ideal, and to Drinkwater's petulant Queen, who complains that she can find no lover sufficiently worthy. We have Schiller's repentant sinner, and Banks's Mary who never could have sinned. Drinkwater's play suggests a sovereign personality; Haynes's play, dealing with precisely the same period, shows us a powerless victimized Mary with Ruthven the compelling force.

The conflicting theories of Mary's biographers are also confusing. Take, for instance, the matter of Mary's religion. Dakers gives us a pretty picture of an advanced, enlightened woman who, although a sincere Catholic herself, with equal sincerity advocated religious tolerance. 2. Gorman informs us that Mary was corresponding with the Pope in an apparently sincere endeavor to reestablish Catholicism in Scotland. 3. Henderson assures us that this correspondence was purely a political move. 4. Linklater is convinced that in entering

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1. Zweig, Mary, Queen of Scotland and the Isles, p. 265
  2. Dakers, The Tragic Queen, p. 29
  3. Gorman, p. 247
  4. Henderson, Mary, Queen of Scots, I, 198-199

upon it, Mary was guilty of certain duplicity.<sup>1.</sup> Miss Bowen shows us that Mary was so far from wishing Catholicism as a state religion the she put to death forty-eight priests and impeached a Bishop for the practice of their religion.<sup>2.</sup>

Every biographer has his story with regard to the marriage of Mary and the Earl of Bothwell. Compulsion, fear, passion, desire for protection - even a desire to conciliate Bothwell - - these with a multitude of variations have been suggested as motives for Mary's marriage with the Border Earl. The volumes of conflicting evidence that have been brought forward to prove Mary guilty or not guilty in the death of Darnley almost make a library in themselves.

Every Mary is pictured, from the traditional, passionate "femme fatale," in love with everyone, to a woman who "in her forty-five years had caught at the semblance of love but twice and each time the after-taste had been bitter in her mouth"<sup>3.</sup> or a woman who "for the sake of one rich moment of passionate accomplishment . . . was capable of risking kingdom, power, and sovereign dignity."<sup>4.</sup>

#### DRAMATIC DIFFICULTIES IN MARY'S CAREER

This conflicting evidence makes it almost impossible to say what is and what is not a true picture of Mary. It would seem that, placed in a little different circumstances, she would make an excellent dramatic heroine. It is certain

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1. Linklater, Mary, Queen of Scots, p.53
2. Bowen, Mary, Queen of Scotland, p.96
3. Gorman, p.556
4. Zweig, p.78



dramatic difficulties in her career that make unjustifiable the interest of so many dramatists in her story. For her career as it stands - thrilling stage material though it appears upon the surface - proves less well fitted to dramatic treatment, as we shall see when we examine it more closely.

#### UNHISTORIC ELEMENTS IN THE THREE SUCCESSFUL PLAYS

It is interesting first to note that the three successful plays mentioned above, completely absorbed in Mary's personality, take a great many liberties with her career. Most striking of all is the fact that these three plays, and these alone of the plays in this group, have introduced a meeting between Mary and Elizabeth - a meeting which, of course, never took place in history. The spirit that prompted this invention is, I think, the keynote of the situation. These three dramatists have had the perception and the courage to strengthen some of the weak links in Mary's story, thus achieving a simplification of plot and dramatic unity.

##### 1. BANKS

Banks, apparently in an attempt to observe the unities, brings Mary to Whitehall, where she remains for a few hours until she meets her death offstage in approved Grecian fashion. Mary actually was executed at Fotheringhay, where she had been imprisoned for five months before her death. This invention of Banks's leads to other inventions. The Duke of Norfolk, who was executed in 1572, and who never really met Mary, makes

love to her here while Elizabeth hovers in the wings. Elizabeth has him put to death a few hours before she is persuaded to sign Mary's death warrant. Not only do the two queens meet in this play; at the climax, they fall into each other's arms, and one might almost hope for a complete reconciliation, had not the tragic denouement been given away in the subtitle.<sup>1.</sup> Mary's memory is completely vindicated, before the final curtain, by the arrival from Scotland of positive proof of Morton's guilt.

## 2. SCHILLER

Schiller was concerned with writing a tragedy about a protagonist who was a prisoner, and therefore unable to make any decision that would control her fate.<sup>2.</sup> He therefore set about creating an illusion that Mary's destiny might be changed. To do this, he invented from whole cloth a character, Mortimer, who is represented as the nephew of Mary's jailer, and a religious fanatic who is infatuated with the Scottish Queen. While plotting to murder Elizabeth, he is chosen by her to murder Mary. Mary's cause is supported also by no less a person than the Earl of Leicester, who uses his influence to bring about a meeting of the queens in the park at Fotheringhay. Here it is made to seem that Mary's spiteful and passionate outburst causes Elizabeth's decision that her prisoner must die. An attempt on Elizabeth's life as she rides back to London leads to the discovery of the intrigues of Leicester and Mortimer. Leicester manages to throw the guilt of the

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1. The Albion Queens or The Death of Mary, Queen of Scots was the title.
  2. Thomas, p.359



whole sorry affair upon Mortimer, but regrets that he has failed Mary as he meets her most dramatically, but again most unhistorically, as she walks to her execution.

### 3. MAXWELL ANDERSON

After an examination of this fabrication, it would at first seem that Maxwell Anderson had stayed very close to history. Besides the meeting of the two queens, he has deviated from history in only one important respect: he has pictured the love of Mary and Bothwell as a force that swept through her life from her earliest days in Scotland until she was queen of only a few faithful servants. Bothwell, whom even the most scandal-mongering of Mary's biographers scarcely mention until well after the time of her second marriage, here is shown as an urgent suitor before she even considers Darnley. Bothwell, who is said to have had three wives at once,<sup>1.</sup> here not only has no wife other than Mary, but apparently she is the only real love of his life. Even Elizabeth in this play, though with purposes of her own, suggests Bothwell as Mary's second husband. This Bothwell does not desert the Queen who has given up everything for him. Instead of escaping ignobly to Denmark, he fights for Mary in Scotland, while she waits in Carlisle for his victory and her release.

The visit of the Scottish lords, as well as the visit of Elizabeth to Mary at Carlisle is unhistoric. So also

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1. Besides Lady Jane Gordon, he may have been married to the Danish Anne Thronthsson and to Janet Beaton, the wizard Lady of Branxholme. Lang, Mystery of Mary Stuart, p.48.

is the solitary confinement to which Mary is condemned at the end of the play. Certain of her followers accompanied her even to the scaffold; her household was a very real expense to the English state.

#### 1. POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS IN SCOTLAND

By these inventions, and by certain modifications, these dramatists have avoided several of the dramatic pitfalls in Mary's actual career. Not the least of these is the complicated character of sixteenth century Scottish politics. It is difficult to understand Mary's problems in Scotland without knowing something about her courtiers- if such a name can be applied to these rude Scottish nobles. Moray, Maitland of Lethington, Morton, Ruthven, Huntly, Arran are a few of those whose warring interests threatened to engulf Mary. None of them maintained so consistent an attitude toward his Queen that one could say at the rise of the curtain: "That man will be friendly - or antagonistic - to Mary throughout the play." The Hamiltons, of which clan the Earl of Arran was the head, fought bravely for Mary at Langside, but had they won, they planned to marry the Queen off to Lord John Hamilton.<sup>1</sup> Early in her reign, they had plotted to kidnap her, kill her immediate advisers, marry her to the mentally unbalanced Arran and reign in her stead.<sup>2</sup> When she was imprisoned in Lochleven,

1. Henderson II, 488-491

2. Parry, pp. 77-78

they had at first planned to kill her.<sup>1.</sup> Maitland of Lethington apparently stood staunchly by Mary's failing fortunes. He was the last noble of note to remain at court after the Bothwell marriage.<sup>2.</sup> He, together with Kircaldy of Grange, held Edinburgh castle, Mary's last outpost in Scotland, for years after she was imprisoned in England. But in the early years of Mary's reign, Lethington was all too closely associated with Moray. He<sup>3.</sup> was certainly involved in the Riccio conspiracy. Such were her friends. Of course, she had a few apparent friends who were rather consistently antagonistic - such as Moray, who always knew all about everything, but who<sup>4.</sup> always had an incontestable alibi.

## 2. FOREIGN COMPLICATIONS

If the politics of the time are to be considered, the interest of foreign monarchs in Scotland can hardly be ignored. This was mainly religious. If Mary married the heir to a Catholic throne, as for instance Don Carlos, would that give the Catholics in Scotland the courage to rise? When Mary married the Catholic Darnley, would that have the same result, or would it merely crystallize Protestant sentiment against her? Not the least interested of these monarchs was Queen Elizabeth, never far from whom lurked the fear that some Catholic assassin might attack her in the

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1. Henderson, II, 489
2. Linklater, p. 113
3. Gorman, p. 289
4. Lang, p. 21



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interest of Mary Queen of Scots, who once had been proclaimed the rightful Queen of England. Our dramatist must decide what part this most powerful of Mary's many antagonists played in the deeds of violence that were taking place in Scotland. Was she merely a politician dealing with Mary herself, or as Parry suggests, was she supplying all of Mary's Scottish enemies with English gold to further an

2.  
English policy? Maxwell Anderson chooses to simplify his story by forgetting all the personal differences of the Scottish lords, and by suggesting that they all, together with John Knox, were under the control of Elizabeth. Banks and Schiller avoid this Scottish period altogether. Both of them make the rivalry of the two queens almost completely personal. Maxwell Anderson allows a personal element to color very vividly a political rivalry. A dramatist who attempted to consider honestly the plots and counterplots that were the politics of Mary's time was Mr. Swinburne, whose encyclopedic Bothwell covers this portion of Mary's career in 532 pages and 60 scenes - hardly within the scope of stageable drama. Mr. Shaler, who in The Rival Queens attempts to keep the rivalry purely on a political plane, does not succeed in being very interesting.

### 3. ELIZABETH

In spite of all their bitter rivalry on the one side, because of it on the other, Mary and Elizabeth failed to

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1. Dakers, p.34
2. Parry, p.246

meet. This in itself is an almost insuperable obstacle to the dramatist who would remain faithful to history. How can he write a theatrically effective play when his two main characters never appear together upon the stage? All of the dramatists in this study except the three successful ones resort to letters, ambassadors and other unhistorical but undramatic devices. That Banks, Schiller and Maxwell Anderson have gained by inventing a meeting of the queens is obvious in that this scene immediately dominates the play. In Banks's and Schiller's plays it is definitely the climax; in Mary of Scotland, it is the final and probably the most effective scene.<sup>1.</sup>

But even if the queens meet, still there is a problem. The story, as it has come to us, gives us a picture of Mary always on the defensive, with Elizabeth the affirmative force. Elizabeth had power, not only over her own subjects, but over some of Mary's too.<sup>2.</sup> Mary's sovereignty was little more than nominal.<sup>3.</sup> Even when she was on supposedly equal terms with her rival, it was she who asked favors; Elizabeth who granted or withheld them. Would Elizabeth grant Mary a safe-conduct? Could not she and Elizabeth meet? Would not Elizabeth name her as successor, since she was the rightful successor anyway? As James Boaden says in his Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons, "The inherent difficulty of this

1. New Republic, 77:131
2. "Had she any detailed information as to which of the Scots peers were actually in the pay of Cecil, and how far they were pledged to an English alliance?" Parry, p.52
3. Henderson, II, 448



story to an Englishman is the attention demanded by the rival Queens - - - Mary of Scotland is not quite the person whom I should select to blight the fame of our glorious Elizabeth."<sup>1.</sup> Somehow it offends our sense of dramatic values to have the heroine of our play consistently a suppliant to someone else. Banks solves the problem by picturing Elizabeth and Mary both at the mercy of Elizabeth's ministers. Schiller shows a woman of spirit who defies an almost inhuman Queen Elizabeth. Anderson's Elizabeth also is a villain, and if the villain directs the whole action, we see only that it is a very plucky Queen of Scotland against whom the cards are so heavily stacked. Drinkwater's Elizabeth never appears; yet even in Mary's encounter with the English ambassador we feel that the English queen is by far the more positive force. In the three plays where we see the two queens together, we can weigh Mary's personal qualities against those of the woman who had all the might on her side.

#### 4. ATTRITION

Mary Stuart's story represents a long and dreary period of wearing out. In one sense, its climax came when she was sixteen years old, Queen of France and Scotland, and proclaimed, by a loyal Catholic world, Queen of England. Her career in Scotland was a plucky, but almost from the

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1. Boaden, p.326

first, a losing fight against forces that had proved too powerful for one after another of Mary Stuart's ancestors. Her one chance for security lay in a marriage that would have been at once acceptable to Elizabeth, to Knox, to Moray, to the Scottish people and to Mary herself - and that would have been a miracle. After she chose the worthless Darnley, it was only a matter of time until her downfall. She had even then, it is true, two important victories - when she drove the rebel Moray out of Scotland, and when she outwitted the Riccio conspirators. But she drove Moray, it must be remembered, only to the border. Later, after Elizabeth had heard his story and given him refuge for some months, he came back. The exiled Riccio conspirators later came back too. When Mary was driven from Scotland after a story of murder and suspicion and imprisonment and flight and defeat, for her there was no returning. She was still only twenty-five; so far the denouement had been rapid. But then it lengthened out into nineteen unutterably weary years when absolutely nothing happened that in any way altered the fortunes of the onetime Queen of Scotland. Possibly one prison was a little less uncomfortable than another; that was all. But if a dramatist wishes to deal with Mary's execution, those nineteen years are there; everyone knows about them; somehow they must be dealt with. Banks and Schiller have compressed them, representing Mary as still

a young woman when she met her death. Maxwell Anderson chooses to allow the years with their unhappy ending to hang an ominous shadow over Mary as, at the very beginning of her imprisonment, his final curtain falls. John St. John's play, on the other hand, which shows an imprisoned Mary, aggressive only through a vacillating Norfolk who gets himself killed in the middle of the fourth act, gives all too clearly an impression of clutching at straws. James Boaden says that the last scene makes the five acts "endurable - though never popular."<sup>1.</sup> N.S.Shaler, who spends five acts describing in some detail the events of the nineteen years, has written a rather tiresome play.

## 5. FAILURE

Mary's story is undramatic because the heroine was a failure and not a particularly glorious failure. Personally, Mary was courageous, plucky, independent; still, because of the circumstances in which she was placed, her actions were often controlled by other people. Even during the period that I suggested marked the zenith of her power, her French policy was largely dictated to her by her uncle, the Cardinal of Lorraine;<sup>2.</sup> Scottish affairs went merrily on without her. In 1560, a packed Parliament met without Mary's summons, formally adopted the Protestant doctrine for Scotland and declared that the celebration of the

1. Boaden, p.326

2. Henderson I, 78-79



Mass would be punishable by death.<sup>1.</sup> Her sovereignty during her first years in Scotland is open to question. Not everyone agrees with Parry that "it was known in every court in Europe that in 1562, Mary was a mere puppet in the hands of others."<sup>2.</sup> It is certain, however, that it was not the Queen's command but the sword of Lord James Stuart that made possible the celebration of the Mass in the Queen's chapel on a certain Sunday soon after Mary's arrival in Scotland.<sup>3.</sup> It is certain also that the Queen could be made virtually a prisoner in her own palace as she was after the Riccio conspiracy. It seems also to be fairly well agreed that Mary could not have punished the murderers of Darnley, even had she wished to do so, because "the powerful group of nobles who encompassed this deed ruled all."<sup>4.</sup> From then on, of course, she was admittedly under the control of others. She was unable to keep her throne, and she was unable to rally any person or any country to her cause to regain her sovereignty. Had she died a natural death in prison, or had she escaped to France and become a nun, her story would have held much less interest, I think, for dramatist and biographer alike.<sup>5.</sup> By the manner of her death, she became at once a Catholic martyr and a tragic heroine. But if the story ends with the executioner's axe,

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1. Henderson, I, 128-129

2. Parry, p. 91

3. Gorman, p. 41

4. Ibid, p. 319

5. Almost half of the plays particularly studied have dealt primarily with Mary's imprisonment and death.

Mary is still a defeated woman. The dramatist must suggest that her victory over Elizabeth is still to come. As Banks's Mary expresses it:

"And thy tormented soul with envy burst  
To see thy crown on Mary's issue shine  
And England flourish with a race of mine."  
( IV,1,442)

or as Maxwell Anderson more beautifully expressed it:

"Win now - take your triumph now  
For I'll win men's hearts in the end - though the  
sifting takes  
This hundred years - or a thousand."  
( III, )

Contrast this with Drinkwater's Mary who, still at the height of her power, is heard to say, " I shall lose . . . Doom is coming . . . I shall make a good end. That is all."<sup>1.</sup> Indeed, this woman , by her own admission, is "destroyed by base and little lovers."<sup>2.</sup>

## 6. LACK OF A HERO

Mary Stuart's story is that of a heroine without a hero - a serious enough difficulty in any love story. Cleopatra was loved by Mark Antony and Julius Caesar; for Mary Stuart there were Darnley and Bothwell, and it may be seriously doubted whether either one of them really loved her. In the words of Miss Bowen: "Neither her rank, her family, her sex, her youth, nor her beauty, nor her unprotected state, nor her kind pretty ways roused in the breast of one man an unwavering loyalty, a wholehearted desire to protect and

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1. Drinkwater, Mary Stuart, pp.42-44
  2. Ibid,p.41

cherish this alluring and lovely girl. Every powerful man with whom she came in contact used her for his own ends of ambition, of self seeking, of greed, of malice; those willing to risk their fortunes for her, even to die for her were humble folk like Willie Douglas and even of these there were not many. However potent her fascinations may have been, they were not potent enough to induce one powerful man of her own caste to forsake his own interest for hers." <sup>1.</sup> As we have seen, Banks obviated this difficulty by idealizing Norfolk, Schiller by inventing Mortimer, Anderson by whitening the scutcheon of the Earl of Bothwell, that he might be a worthy lover even for such a Queen. John St. John, on the other hand, offers an untouched picture of the Earl of Norfolk - with sorry results. Gordon Daviot also stays close to history with a Darnley of ephemeral charm and a rather contemptible Bothwell. Drinkwater, as I have suggested, also fails to provide a hero. None of these plays were particularly successful.

#### CONCLUSION

Mary Stuart's story, then, is no more than an inspiration to a dramatist. It appears, on the surface to be excellent dramatic material,, but unless a playwright trusts to his own invention to deal with its weaknesses, he will be sadly disappointed. In spite of this, Mary's

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1. Bowen, pp.103-104



compelling personality seems still to intrigue dramatist and playgoer alike. The drama alone would seem to justify Mary's cryptic motto: "En ma fin est ma commencement."

1. Kipka lists an unfinished play by Philip, Duke of Wharton, (1699-1731) of which only the following four lines remain:

"Sure were I free and Norfolk were a prisoner  
I'd fly with more impatience to his arms  
Than the poor Israelite gazed on the serpent  
When life was the reward of every look." 1.

The epilogue, written by Lady Mary Wortley Montague, has been published among her poems.

2. The following plays listed by Kipka I have been unable to find:

Mary Deverell, Mary, Queen of Scots, an Historical Tragedy, 1792. Genest describes this as "a poor play, particularly in point of language." 2. It was never acted. 3. A "short but perhaps sufficient specimen" 4. of the lady's poetry follows:

Queen Mary: "Earth's summit of joy I've long since reached  
Now in misery chained, each state I  
retrospect." 5.

Thomas Francklin, Mary, Queen of Scots, 1770. This play was many times announced but never acted. It remained in manuscript until 1837, when it was published by the eldest son of the author, Lieutenant Colonel William Francklin. 6.

William Sotheby, The Death of Darnley, 1814. This is not listed by Nicoll or Genest.

Miss Elizabeth Wright Macauley, Mary Stuart, a dramatic representation, London, 1823. This is not listed by Nicoll.

1. Biographia Dramatica, III, 24
2. Genest X, 201
3. Ibid, X, lxxx
4. Biographia Dramatica, III, 24
5. Ibid
6. Dict. Nat. Biog., XX, 182ff.

Mary Russel Mitford, Mary, Queen of Scots, a scena in English dramatic verse. In Dramatic Scenes and other Poems London, 1831. Listed by Nicoll; apparently not intended to be staged.

Violet Fane, Anthony Babington, London, 1876.

David Riccio and other Plays, by the author of Ginevra, 1882.

Charles Gulland, Elizabeth of England, a drama in five acts. Printed in the "Fifeshire Journal Office," 1883.

M. Quinn, Mary, Queen of Scots, a tragedy in three acts. London, 1884.

Major General John Watts De Peyster, Bothwell, an historical drama. New York, 1885.

Robert Blake, Mary, Queen of Scots, a tragedy in three acts. London, 1894.

David Grahame, Riccio, an historical tragedy. Westminster, 1898.

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